

# Area's churches grew from 1880s

The 1880s were the founding and building years for the churches of Camas and Washougal, beginning with the organizing of Bethel Congregational Church in Washougal on May 2, 1880.

There was, of course, a great deal of church activity in the preceding decades. But it was mostly unorganized or centered in Vancouver.

In the 1860s, the famous Catholic missionary, Father Blanchet, was riding horseback over the rutted rail from Vancouver to visit the Catholics who had settled near the site of Washougal.

Church services of many groups were held in private homes, in the early days. Many of the ministers came from Vancouver, either by horse, like Fr. Blanchet, or by steamer up the Columbia River.

Bethel Congregational was established by the Rev. H. Atkinson, general missionary superintendent for the Territory of Washington, on May 2, 1880. The first trustees were David Shepherd, Sr., Joseph E.C. Durgan, and David Russell.

A 24-by-30-foot building was erected at 1st and Durgan streets. Articles of incorporation were obtained in 1882, and a building erected. A new church replaced it in 1909, and, in recent years, a third.

A little verse about this early congregation was recorded by the late Sarah McLeod:

"Libby Morgan plays the organ,  
Molly Durgan sings;  
The Shepherd boys join in the chorus,  
And make the old place ring."

## ST. JOHN'S PRESBYTERIAN

In 1881, work was begun on a frame building on Division Street, Camas, just below the Mill Ditch, which was to be St. John's Presbyterian Church. At that time, worship was taking place in MacMaster's warehouse. St. John's was formally established in 1883, with five charter members: Aeneas MacMaster, Elizabeth MacMaster, Martha Conkling, C.F. McCord and F. Knutson. First pastor was the Rev. J.A. Hanna.

A contemporary, Hugh MacMaster, has written about this period:

"A plan was worked among four denominations so that one church building might accommodate all four

groups," he said. This plan was that one group would have entire control of the services for one week, and another the next week, and so on... Complete harmony prevailed among all members. This plan until each group could afford to build an individual house."

## ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

It was also in 1881 that the first Roman Catholic church was constructed at LaCamas lake, in which Mass was said once a month. Some of the names associated with this church were Delaney, Sweeny, Dowd, O'Reilly, Bartholomy, Deleat, Nolan, and Coffey.

This church was replaced in 1901 by a church built at 14th and Birch, in Camas, called St. Thomas Aquinas, and in that same year the people in Washougal decided that they too needed a church. Land was donated by the Gresz family, and a small church and cemetery were placed there. The first couple married there were Mr. and Mrs. Max Schmid.

In the early forties the Washougal church was finally closed, and both congregations concentrated on building a new edifice on Fourth and Oak streets. This church, St. Thomas's, was dedicated in 1950 by the coadjutor bishop of Seattle.

## METHODISTS

Next to organize in the area were the Methodists, in 1884. It began with the Rev. Ferguson and five members (two families). The first resident minister was the Rev. W.H. Drake, who served from 1887 to 1888. In December 1888, 12 members voted to incorporate and make plans for a building. The new building, at 4th Ave. and Franklin, was dedicated in 1891.

However, in 1949, a new church site was purchased on NE 14th and Everett, and the present church structure was opened for services July 9, 1950, with the resident Methodist Bishop Gerald Kennedy as the guest speaker.

During this period of construction, the minister was the Rev. Robert Shaw.

## BAPTISTS

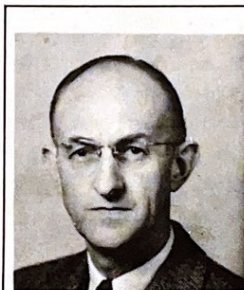
In 1885, the First Baptist Church was begun. Early records of the church read:

"In the year 1885, on Saturday, April 18, the Rev. J.C. Baker was called to the chair, and the following persons agreed to unite together as a Baptist

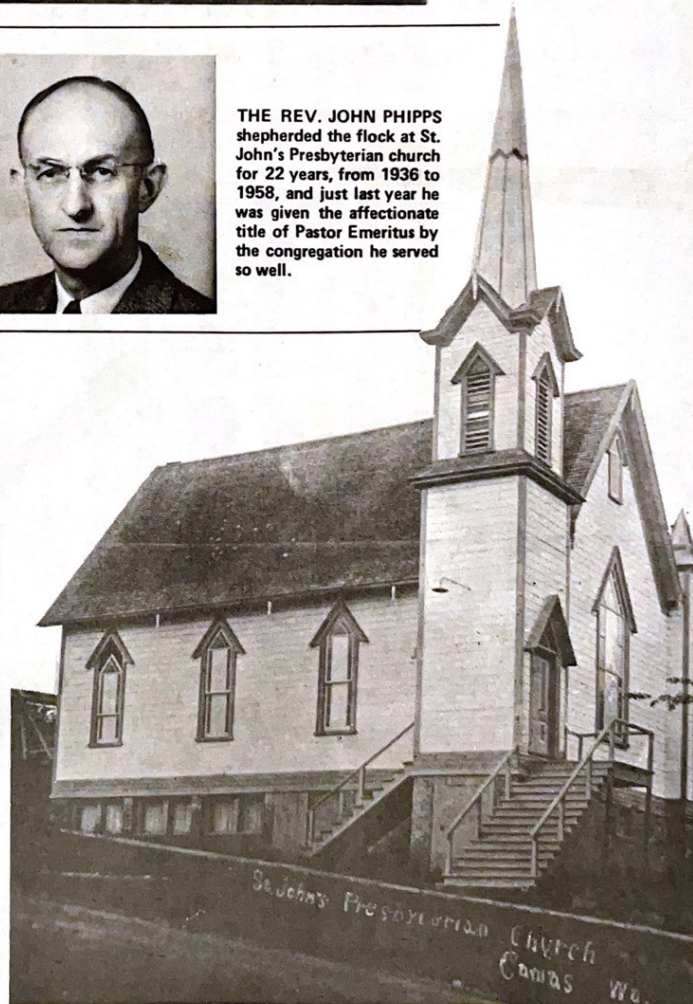
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THIS LITTLE CHURCH ON THE HILL, St. Thomas Aquinas, was built in 1901, at 14th and Birch streets in Camas, to replace an earlier Roman Catholic church built on Lackamas Lake.



THE REV. JOHN PHIPPS shepherded the flock at St. John's Presbyterian church for 22 years, from 1936 to 1958, and just last year he was given the affectionate title of Pastor Emeritus by the congregation he served so well.



THE FIRST CHURCH in Camas was the Presbyterian, built in 1866 (on Division Street), but used by the Baptists, Methodists and Evangelicals. For several years, services were conducted by one church one Sunday and another the next, with practically everyone attending all services.